

Le Chemin d' AYLMER *Road*

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY • UNE HISTOIRE ILLUSTRÉE



Diane Aldred

THE OTTAWA VALLEY HUNT CLUB

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The Master of Hounds was Graham Mayburry, who released the hounds at the Dixons' barn where the hunts began. The hunts were wide-ranging "drag" hunts in which the horses and hounds followed a scent that had been laid down across the open fields on the north side of the Aylmer Road. The farmers were happy to co-operate, their only proviso being that the hunts should not cut through fields where the crops had not yet been harvested.

Hunt Club members hunted twice a week during the fall, holding a final dinner to thank the farmers at the end of the season. The Club enjoyed an active social life during the fall of luncheons and teas hosted by members who lived along the Aylmer Road. Many members performed regularly in competitions held at Rockcliffe, the Central Canada Exhibition and the Experimental Farm. Members quite often held shows for charitable causes where their expertise in the saddle was a featured attraction. The Aylmer Fair's horse show was one of the best competitive events in the region, thanks to the Aylmer Road's participation.

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Le *Ottawa Valley Hunt Club* est une branche de l'*Ottawa Hunt and Riding Club* dont le siège social était à la ferme de Jasper Rowe, près du pont Billings. Au début des années 1930, il y avait trop de constructions dans ce secteur pour qu'on puisse s'y adonner à la chasse. Le Club chercha un lieu plus propice à ses activités et trouva Sir James MacBrien, qui était commissaire de la GRC, devint maître de chasse du Club. Comme il résidait alors dans la maison Crerar sur le chemin d'Aylmer, il décida de déménager le siège du Club au long du chemin d'Aylmer et de donner au nouveau nom de *Ottawa Valley Hunt Club*.

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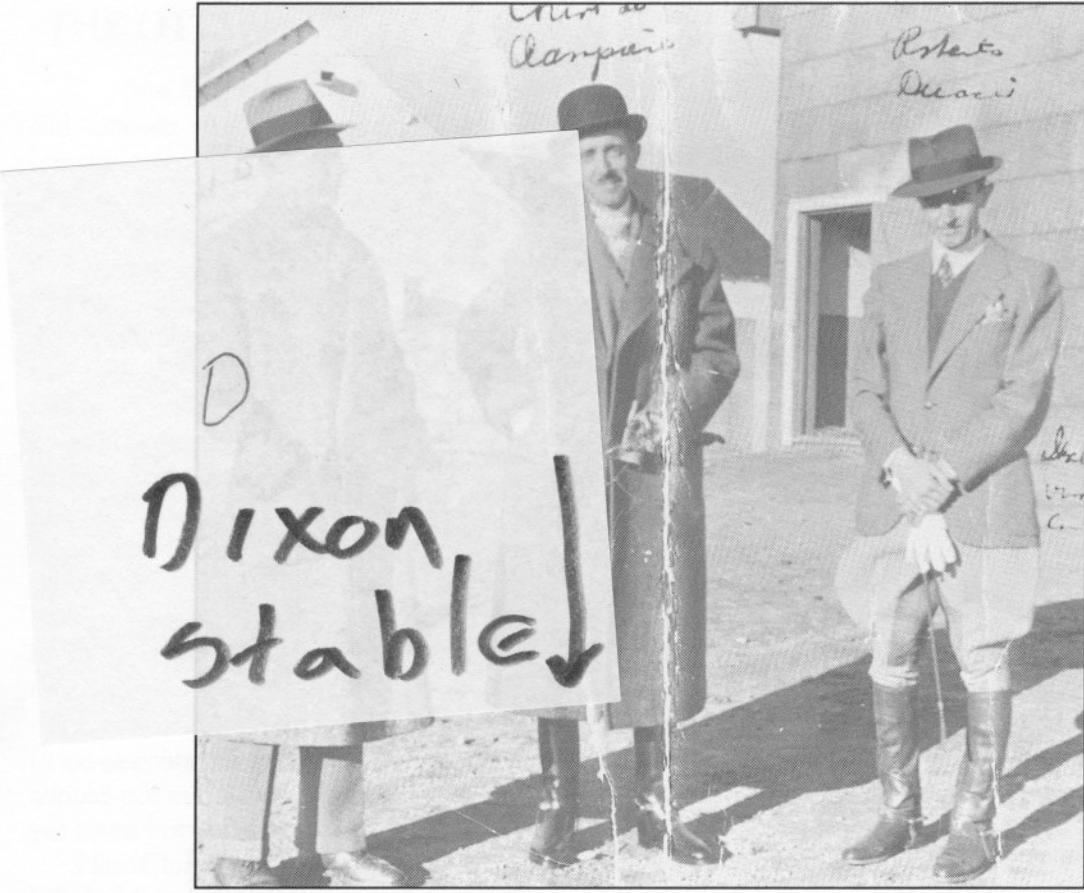
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LEFT/CI-CONTRE
Hunt Club members.
Left to right: the Polish Ambassador, the French Ambassador, the Count de Dompierre, the Italian Vice-consul, Roberto Ducci.

Membres du Hunt Club
De gauche à droite : l'ambassadeur de la Pologne, l'ambassadeur de la France, le comte de Dompierre, le vice-consul de l'Italie, Robert Ducci.

DOWN/CI-DESSOUS
The Dixons' stable, located in the converted cow barn.

L'écurie des Dixon, aménagée dans une ancienne étable.

DIXON





E. WRIGHT



GRAHAM

ABOVE/CI-DESSUS

Mr. & Mrs. J.C. Jamieson on the steps of their house located just west of the McConnell log house.

M. et Mme J.C. Jamieson sur les marches de leur maison située juste à l'ouest de la maison de bois rond des McConnell.

LEFT/CI-CONTRE

"Banny" Dixon seated on the rear bumper of a car parked at the jumping ring at the Aylmer Fair, 1936.

«Banny» Dixon assis sur le pare-choc arrière d'une automobile garée près de la piste de saut à la foire d'Aylmer en 1936.

In 1923, the house and farm were bought by Dr. W.F. Mayburry. Dr. Mayburry was married to Florence Graham who died in 1907. He married a second time to her sister, Mildred. Both women were daughters of Dr. C.E. Graham of Hull. The Mayburrys rented the farm to Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Jamieson who operated a dairy here until 1935. The Jamiesons lived in a house at the end of a long laneway on the west side of the log house. This house, which had been moved from the field on the west side, was burned to the ground as an exercise for Aylmer firefighters in the early 1980s.

The Mayburrys, who called the stone house "Gray Stone", added the sunroom on the west side, and replaced an earlier front porch built by the Slaters with the existing porch. In 1935, the Jamiesons moved their dairy operations to the Fraser Road. The Mayburrys converted their cow barn into a horse stable, and rented the farm to Bannistre (Banny) and Hilda Dixon who bred and sold thoroughbred horses and ran a riding academy here until the late 1940s. In 1935, the Mayburrys' farm was made headquarters for the Ottawa Valley Hunt Club, and some of the members' horses were boarded there. Sir James MacBrien was Master of the Hunt and Dr. Mayburry's son, Graham, was Master of Hounds.

When Dr. Mayburry died in 1935, his property was inherited by Graham Mayburry who built his new house on the south side of the Aylmer Road, a mile or so to the east. In 1938, Mayburry sold a building lot to the just-widowed Lady MacBrien, who constructed the white house at the curve in the road, west of the Mayburry house. In that same year, Mayburry donated the lot for the new municipal hall.

In 1966, the stone house and four acres of land were sold to W.T. Armstrong, a senior executive with the C.B.C. The present owner of the house, Dr. André Bégin, purchased it in 1975. Development of the surrounding farm land began in 1991.

The log house was sold in 1970 to Joseph Davidson who had worked for many years at the Mayburry farm and had resided in the house. His son J.R. Davidson acquired it soon after. In 1982, a fire in the house destroyed the upper floor, but left the main storey intact. Photographs show the great changes that have been made to the house since then.

En 1923, la maison et la ferme furent achetées par le Dr W.F. Mayburry, époux de Florence Graham qui mourut en 1907 et dont il épousa la soeur Mildred en secondes noces. Les deux femmes étaient les filles du Dr C.E. Graham de Hull. Les Mayburry louèrent la ferme à M. et M^{me} J.C. Jamieson qui y exploiterent une laiterie jusqu'en 1935. Les Jamieson vivaient dans une maison à l'extrémité d'un long chemin du côté ~~ouest de la maison de bois rond~~. Cette maison, qui avait été déménagée du champ situé sur le ~~ouest~~, fut rasée par les flammes dans le cadre d'un exercice effectué par les pompiers d'Aylmer au début des années 1980.

Les Mayburry, qui appelaient la maison de pierre "Gray Stone", ajoutèrent le solarium du côté ouest et remplacèrent le porche de façade construit par les Slaters par le porche actuel. En 1935, les Jamieson déménagèrent leur exploitation laitière sur le chemin Fraser. Les Mayburry transformèrent la ferme d'élevage en une écurie et louèrent la ferme à Bannistre (Banny) et Hilda Dixon qui y élevèrent des chevaux de race pour les vendre et y dirigèrent une école d'équitation jusqu'à la fin des années 1940. En 1935, la ferme Mayburry devint le siège du Ottawa Valley Hunt Club et certains des chevaux des membres y furent logés. Sir James MacBrien était maître de chasse et le fils du Dr Mayburry, Graham, maître d'équipage.

À la mort du Dr Mayburry en 1935, sa propriété fut cédée en héritage à Graham Mayburry qui construisit sa nouvelle maison du côté sud du chemin d'Aylmer, environ un mille à l'est. En 1938, Mayburry vendit un terrain à bâtir à Lady MacBrien, qui venait de perdre son mari, et qui construisit la maison blanche dans le tournant du chemin, à l'ouest de la maison des Mayburry. La même année, Mayburry fit don du terrain pour la construction de la nouvelle salle municipale.

En 1966, la maison de pierre et quatre acres de terrain furent vendus à W.T. Armstrong, cadre supérieur de la Société Radio-Canada. Le propriétaire actuel de la maison, le Dr André Bégin, l'acheta en 1975. Le lotissement des terrains de ferme environnants débuta en 1991.

La maison de bois rond fut vendue en 1970 à Joseph Davidson qui l'avait habitée et qui avait travaillé pendant de nombreuses années à la ferme Mayburry. Son fils, J.R. Davidson, l'acheta peu de temps après. En 1982, un incendie détruisit l'étage, mais laissa le rez-de-chaussée intact. Les photographies montrent les nombreux changements qui ont été apportés à la maison depuis.

The most historic building in the Outaouais, and possibly the most important private building in the National Capital Region, is teetering on the brink. It's the British Hotel in Aylmer.

Its glory has faded, but most visitors to the city will recognize the noble limestone structure on the main street, many fine details butchered and defaced with an electric sign of outstanding bad taste. But it's there, and for once there is enormous public support behind the rebirth of a remarkable historic structure.

There should be. This was once reputed to be the finest hotel in all Canada. Its patrons included the future King Edward VII, Sir John A. Macdonald and other Fathers of Confederation. It was the glittering social centre of the city, which was once the political and administrative centre of the whole Outaouais. It was the gracious oasis for the Bytown élite escaping their own roistering frontier village. It was the meeting place of 450 people who founded the first incorporated municipal council in British North America. In later years, it was the country music centre of the national capital. Today, it is the oldest still-functioning Quebec hotel west of the Island of Montreal.

Founded in 1841 by Robert Conroy, for the past 40 years it has been owned by Joe Tchorewski through good times and distinctly bad. Two years ago it was dark, closed when drug traffickers — beyond the control of conscientious owners or police — made it their own. It is open again, but for decades it did not see a gala evening like the one organized by the Aylmer Heritage Association last month.

The occasion was a tribute to Joe Tchorewski for his stubborn loyalty to Aylmer's past and the launching of a history of the hotel sponsored by the Association. It was also the first big public step in the campaign for the hotel's resurrection. Tickets were sold out almost before the event was announced. The crowd was about as big as it had been in 1847 for that first town council meeting. And as enthusiastic.

The Aylmer Heritage Association has been working hard for restoration and the city council has expressed its interest. The Quebec Ministry of Cultural Affairs not only sponsored the history but has indicated the likelihood of substantial financing. Joe Tchorewski is flexible about

COMMENT



The Outaouais

BOB PHILLIPS



FADED GLORY: Aylmer's British Hotel was once reputed to be the finest hotel in all Canada

terms of sale if the building is to be saved. So all is well?

Not quite.

Although some would like to see the hotel restored as a hotel so that both the spirit and the stones of the past could be preserved, the favored solution is a cultural centre that would house a small theatre, exhibition halls, workshops and offices. The target date for completion is just two years away when Aylmer celebrates its 150th anniversary as a municipality. Obviously, millions of dollars will be needed.

The hitch is that a small group has made the brilliant argument that such money could buy, instead of an old building, a new one that would possibly last as long as a well known Ottawa police station. Because the most historic building in the Outaouais has also the region's biggest man-made tourist potential, this proposal is the rough equivalent of the National Capital Commission replacing the Peace Tower with a commercially sponsored amplifier and tape recording of a carillon.

(No! No! The NCC hasn't really planned that — yet.)

Difficult as it is for normal people to believe that a mayor and city council would seriously consider such an approach, these are wondrous times. Despite the current council's expressed desire to have what is left of its historic main street developed as a quality tourist attraction, past city decisions in this area reflect a degree of self-flagellation that seem to make anything possible.

Robert Conroy must be waiting uneasily in his grave. So are the rest of us.

Bob Phillips is a Cantley writer and co-publisher of the Aylmer Bulletin d'Aylmer and The West-Quebec-Post & Bulletin.

Paul Latour, Citizen

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Aylmer
where Grandpa
Dixon stayed

Region's most historic building near the brink

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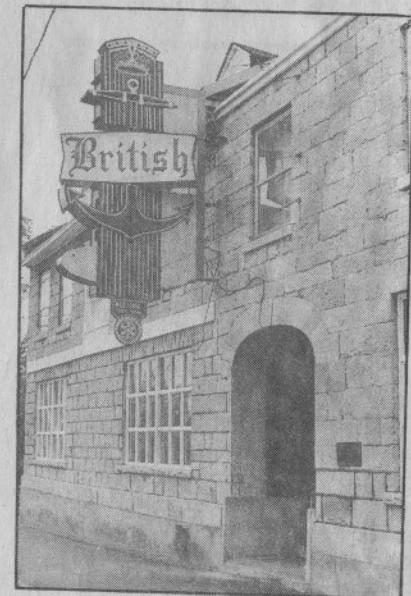
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